



*Stephanie Rawlings-Blake*  
Mayor

## PLANNING COMMISSION

*Wilbur E. "Bill" Cunningham, Chairman*

### STAFF REPORT



*Thomas J. Stosur*  
Director

**November 21, 2013**

**REQUEST:** "Homegrown Baltimore: Grow Local", Baltimore City's Urban Agriculture Plan

**RECOMMENDATION:** Adoption

**STAFF:** Abby Cocke

**PETITIONER(S):** Baltimore Office of Sustainability

**OWNER:** Baltimore Office of Sustainability

#### **SITE/GENERAL AREA**

Site Conditions/General Area: city-wide

#### **HISTORY**

There are no previous legislative or Planning Commission actions regarding this plan. The Commission on Sustainability voted to support the plan on October 15, 2013.

#### **CONFORMITY TO PLANS**

The plan is consistent with the City of Baltimore's Comprehensive Master Plan, specifically: LIVE Goal 1: Build Human and Social Capital by Strengthening Neighborhoods by strategically redeveloping vacant properties throughout the city and maintaining and creating safe, clean, and healthy neighborhoods; PLAY Goal 3: Increase the Health of Baltimore's Natural Resources and Open Spaces for Recreation and to Improve Water Quality and to Improve Neighborhood Social, Economic, and Environmental Well-Being; and LEARN Goal 3: Encourage a Culture of Learning by Enhancing Educational and Vocational Opportunities for all Baltimoreans.

The plan is also consistent with the Baltimore Sustainability Plan's Greening Goal #2, Strategy A: "Increase the percentage of land under cultivation for urban agriculture", and Strategy D: "Develop an urban agriculture plan".

#### **ANALYSIS**

Urban agriculture can help address a wide range of current problems by beautifying blighted vacant land, providing a source of fresh, healthy, local food, and providing opportunities for education, income generation, and recreation. Numerous urban agriculture projects are currently underway in the city, including urban farms (both community-oriented and commercially-oriented), community gardens, school gardens, home and rooftop gardens,

aquaculture projects, apiaries, and orchards. City actions can play a determining role in either supporting or hindering these efforts.

Initiated by Mayor Stephanie Rawlings Blake and led by the Baltimore Office of Sustainability, Homegrown Baltimore is an initiative to increase the production, distribution, sales, and consumption of locally grown food within Baltimore. Homegrown Baltimore includes three components: Grow Local, Buy Local, and Eat Local. Grow Local focuses on increasing local food production in Baltimore through urban agriculture. Buy Local addresses sales and distribution of locally produced foods. Eat Local addresses the need to increase demand for local, healthy food.

This plan covers the Grow Local component of Homegrown Baltimore. The plan documents the history, benefits, and types of urban agriculture in Baltimore; lays out current local urban agricultural efforts and the policies that affect them; and identifies challenges and provides recommendations for creating a more robust urban agriculture sector for our city. The plan also briefly introduces some of the strategies for the Buy Local and Eat Local components.

The plan provides policy and programmatic recommendations to better support the various types of urban agriculture, and also addresses issues such as the long-term vision for urban agriculture in the city, and the importance of equity and access for low-income residents in the urban farming movement. The plan was developed over more than a year, with significant input from city agencies and institutional and non-profit partners. Its adoption will help position Baltimore as a leader in sustainable, local food systems, and will help address health disparities created by food deserts in many Baltimore neighborhoods. Some of the Key Recommendations in the plan include:

Barrier	Recommendations
<b>Land</b>	<b>Offer solutions for increased land security to a relevant range of growers:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop Automatic Notification of License Renewal</li> <li>• Streamline Community Managed Open Space Process</li> <li>• Incorporate Community Farms Into Existing Land Trust</li> <li>• Encourage Direct Land Purchasing</li> <li>• Improve Land Leasing Initiative</li> <li>• Strengthen Tenure of Adopt-a-Lot Program</li> <li>• Support Incentives for Gardens and Farms on Privately-Owned Vacant Land</li> </ul>
<b>Water</b>	<b>Ensure Maximum water access for growers by streamlining the process and preserving water supply lines:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve Payment Process for Water Access Program</li> <li>• Develop Options for Winter Water Access</li> <li>• Provide Resource for Sites without a Water Meter Pit</li> <li>• Preserve Existing Water Infrastructure</li> <li>• Support the Development of Rainwater Capture Systems</li> </ul>

<b>Soil</b>	<b>Build rich, safe urban soils through increased access to equipment, compost and local soil testing:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase Equipment Availability</li> <li>• Develop Soil Standards</li> <li>• Provide Soil Testing</li> <li>• Support Composting at All Levels</li> </ul>
<b>Capital</b>	<b>Leverage Local and Regional Resources to help growers:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand Funding Assistance</li> <li>• Support Garden Irrigation Fund</li> </ul>
<b>Agency Support</b>	<b>Streamline operations, regulations and staffing to support growers:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designate DHCD Staff Position</li> <li>• Create Support Staff Position</li> <li>• Support Farm Incubator Development</li> <li>• Assess New Zoning Code's Permit Process</li> <li>• Animal Regulations</li> <li>• Explore Liability Insurance Options</li> <li>• Ensure Citizen Education and Engagement</li> </ul>

**Community Input:** Twenty sets of comments were received, resulting in three new additions to the “Recommendations” section of the plan and many minor edits. Among the other organizations that provided comments are the University of Maryland Extension, Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, Civic Works’ Real Food Farm, Whitelock Community Farm, Big City Farms, Great Kids Farm, Parks & People Foundation, Baltimore Green Space, and Baltimore Orchard Project. No comments called for non-adoption of the plan, and many were strongly positive.

Two letters of support were also received for the plan, from the Farm Alliance of Baltimore City and from Civic Works.

**Notification:** The draft plan was made available for public comment for four weeks during the month of October 2013, which was publicized via e-blasts. During that time, the draft plan was available for download on the Baltimore Office of Sustainability’s website, and was also mailed out in hard copy upon request. The date of the Planning Commission meeting to consider the plan for adoption was also emailed out to more than one hundred people, based on prior expressions of interest in the topic.



**Thomas J. Stosur**  
**Director**